

Teachers' Competencies

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to discuss and clarify the general framework of teachers' competencies. The general framework regarding teacher competencies were explained in nine different dimensions as field competencies, research competencies, curriculum competencies, lifelong learning competencies, social-cultural competencies, emotional competencies, communication competencies, information and communication technologies competencies (ICT) and environmental competencies. Teachers' competencies affect their values, behaviors, communication, aims and practices in school and also they support professional development and curricular studies. Thus, the discussion on teachers' competencies to improve the teaching-learning process in school is of great importance.

Keywords: Teachers' competencies, curriculum, curriculum development, curriculum implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers need to improve knowledge and skills to enhance, improve and explore their teaching practices. Many of the studies on competencies of teachers focus on the teaching role of teachers in the classroom rather than teachers' competencies. Teachers' competencies have been broadening with respect to reform studies in education, development of teacher education, scientific results of educational science and other fields. Kress pointed out that "the previous era had required an education for stability, the coming era requires an education for instability" (133). Kress' ideas can explain why teachers' professional development should be redefined for sustainability. The aims of education change very quickly depending on the demands of the era requiring more capability. These demands directly affect educational system. Teachers are responsible for operating educational system and they need strong and efficient professional competencies. Teachers' competencies must be reviewed so

that teachers' competencies should be redefined depending on the development of the whole life of human and education.

Competencies are defined as "the set of knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for future, which manifests in activities" (Katane et. al. 44). Gupta (4) define competencies as "knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, motivations and beliefs people need in order to be successful in a job." The common understanding related to teachers' competencies is divided into three main areas as field competencies, pedagogical competencies and cultural competencies. Teachers' professional competencies can be composed of different dimensions other than the three main areas (Bulajeva 41; Bridge; Hansen 169; James et al. 113; Stoffels 544; Selvi, *The English language* 5).

Selvi (*The English language* 4) carried out a research regarding the professional competencies of English Language Teachers. The Conventional Delphi Technique was applied in order to constitute the competencies of new teachers based on the teachers' and teacher educators' views. Delphi process was completed after third rounds collecting the responses from the experts and Delphi round continued until the group consensus was achieved. The results of this study indicated that teachers' professional competencies were composed of four main subgroups such as Curriculum Competencies, Lifelong Learning Competencies, Social-Cultural Competencies and Emotional Competencies. The results showed that teachers' competencies must be discussed from a different point of view. In this context, the literature about teachers' competencies was analyzed and the new competency areas constituted as seen below concerning the teachers' competencies were tried to redefine depending on different dimensions of teachers' professional competencies. The main feature of teachers' professional competencies can be explained in a way displayed in Figure 1. First of all, these competencies were explained very briefly and only the curriculum competencies were discussed in detail among the other competencies in this paper.

- Field Competencies
- Research Competencies
- Curriculum Competencies
- Lifelong Learning Competencies
- Social-Cultural Competencies
- Emotional Competencies
- Communication Competencies

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Competencies
- Environmental Competencies

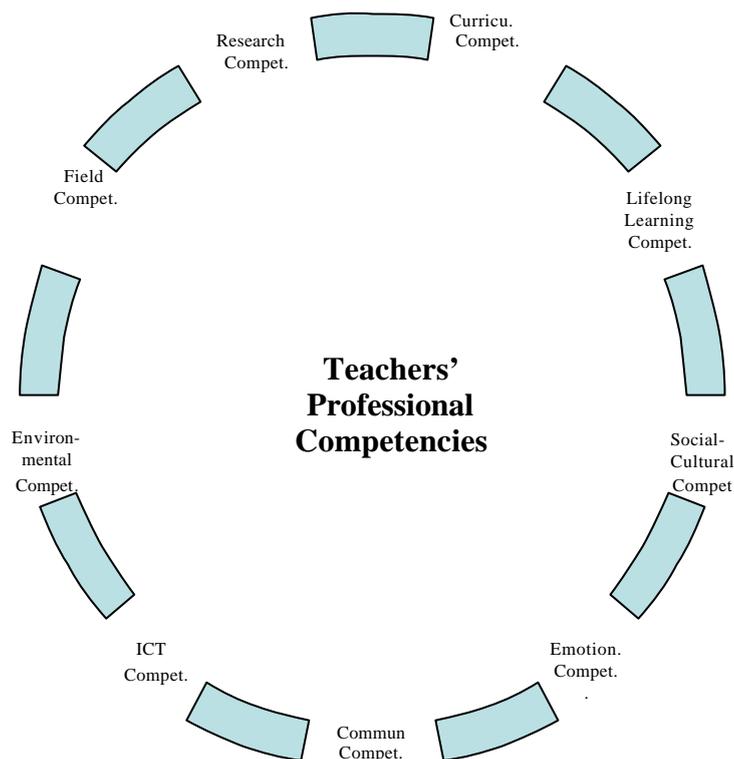


Figure 1. Components of teachers' professional competencies

Field competencies are related to the question of “what should school teach?” They refer to the content that the teacher and students will study. For example, the knowledge of math teachers is the main competency for teachers who will teach in classroom. Field competencies are the main areas of teacher competencies that include academic studies about content. Field competencies are the ones necessary for teachers to conduct their profession. They are the teacher competencies regarding the subjects that teachers will teach or students will learn. Formerly, field competencies were deemed as the most important competency field based on the concept that teachers were the only responsables in transmitting the content. The

concept of the one who knows teaches and the teacher is the responsible from learning in classroom changed over time. Within the context of this change, the importance given to teachers' field competencies declined as a result of the changing role of teacher as rather than transmitting the content but being a facilitator enabling students to interact with content.

Research Competencies include the competencies of research methods and techniques, designing and carrying out research in teachers' fields. They support collaboration with colleagues and other specialists or people who are interested in curriculum studies and education. Research competencies are influential for teachers in following the developments in their fields and developing themselves based on these developments. Besides, the research competencies of teachers are of great importance for students in gaining the scientific thinking and scientific process skills. The research competencies help to improve all of the teachers' competencies and also support research-based teacher education that is a new approach in teacher education (Niemi, Sihvonen 36-37).

The curriculum competencies can be divided into two sub-competencies as curriculum development competencies and curriculum implementation competencies. Curriculum competencies contain the knowledge about curriculum philosophies and skills in curriculum development, curriculum design, elements of the curriculum development, models of curriculum development, approaches of designing curriculum development, curriculum development process, selecting and organizing the content, planning the teaching and testing conditions and preparing research for curriculum development. Curriculum competencies are related to the understanding of the curriculum plans for the teaching and learning. Curriculum competencies are the competencies of teachers oriented towards carrying out their teaching role more effectively. These competencies are related to both theoretical and practical competencies. These competencies defined as learning-teaching related competencies determine the framework of the knowledge and skills that teachers will gain. Without curriculum competencies, it is quiet difficult to produce an effective education service in schools. In order to discuss the curriculum competencies more effectively and explain why teachers need them, they can be analysed in two sub-competencies.

Lifelong learning process requires that learners take responsibility of their learning. As individuals, teachers are acting for their own learning in the lifelong learning process. Lifelong learning activity goes through the whole life continuing between individual and the world (Selvi, *Phenomenology*

489). Lifelong learning competencies include the abilities of learning to learn, and teachers' responsibilities of their own professional development. Lifelong learning competencies are related to the ability of learning and skills of using the means or tools of learning to improve the learning throughout the human life. Lifelong learning competencies refer to the teachers' responsibilities for their own learning and development of lifelong learning skills for students. It means that lifelong learning includes two main abilities. The first one is related to teachers' own lifelong learning ability and the second one is related to teachers' responsibility to develop students' lifelong abilities.

Emotional Competencies are composed of teachers' and students' values, morals, beliefs, attitudes, anxieties, motivation, empathy and so on. They are related to the implementation of psychological consultation and curriculum of guidance in school. Teachers' emotional competencies can help students to learn and students' willingness to learn can be increased if teachers know how to improve the emotional dimension of students' learning. Emotional competencies also help teachers become effective teachers while monitoring the students' learning. Learning requires emotional supports that create positive feeling for learning-teaching process. Teachers become a learning consultant and mentor about learning for their students.

Social-cultural competencies include the knowledge about social-cultural background of students and teachers, local, national and international values, democracy and human rights issues, team and collaborative work with others, and social studies. All of them provide freedom to students and teachers in learning-teaching process and also promote the learning. The individuals become social and cultural being in social life. Thus, there is a strong relationship between learning and students' social-cultural background. Some of the learning theories discussed learning as social-cultural context and teachers' social-cultural competencies can promote students learning. Humanistic approach and social theories can be put into practice in the classroom by means of teachers' social-cultural competencies.

Communication competencies include communication models, interaction among teachers, students, social environment and learning topics. Teachers also have competencies in using oral, body and professional language in their fields. Communication competencies include voice, body language and words such as speaking, singing and sometimes tone of voice, sign language, paralanguage, touch, eye contact, or the use of

writing. They include communication skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating.

Information and Communication Technologies-ICT competencies are based on using tools and technical equipments for the reaching, disturbing and transferring the knowledge. They include any technology that helps to produce, manipulate, store, communicate, and/or disseminate information. ICT competencies are concerned with the use of technology in managing and processing the information include all technologies for the manipulation and communication of information. It means that the ICT competency is very important to improve the communication in the learning and teaching process.

Environmental Competencies can be defined as competencies for ecological and environmental safety. Salite and Pipere (16) explained that ecological/environmental aspect is a dimension of the sustainable development of teachers. Knowledge, attitudes and skills about ecological system and environment such as keeping clean and available environment, management of ecological resources, being aware of ecosystem, feasible uses of natural resources, availability of natural resources can be defined as Environmental competencies. Figure 1 the framework of teachers' competencies. Nevertheless, Figure 1 is not sufficient and it must be improved by further studies depending on the development in all of areas of human life.

DISCUSSION

Education is a discipline aiming at revealing systematic and scientific results towards meeting the needs of individuals and society. Studies need to be carried out to develop all related sub-systems in educational system regarding to meet all needs and expectations. One of the sub-systems in educational system and the first degree responsible from managing this system is the sub-system of teacher training. The basic purpose in teacher training is to ensure the effective planning, management, development and administration of educational system by equipping teachers with certain competencies. The concept of teachers' competencies is mostly discussed in very narrow dimensions such as teachers' planning, implementation, assessment of the curriculum, standards for the curriculum or the school. These are related to teachers' teaching duties in the school. In this respect, teachers' competencies needs to be discussed in many dimensions such as field competencies, research competencies, curriculum competencies,

lifelong learning competencies, social-cultural competencies, emotional competencies, communication competencies, information and communication technologies competencies and environmental competencies in order to develop teachers.

In parallel to the developments emerging in different fields, the changes happening in human life also cause some problems in defining and gaining the teacher competencies. For instance, environmental competencies were not probably discussed twenty five or thirty years ago as a competency field for teachers. However, the problems people have experienced with environment have raised an interest towards environment issue. As a result of this interest, environmental issues have been associated with education and teaching. Therefore, environment issue on which there are still discussions have been discussed as new competency field for teachers. In a nut shell, daily life and all the developments emerging based on human needs influence teaching profession and hence the teacher competencies.

Redefinition of teachers' professional competencies should include the curriculum competencies. Since, the curriculum competencies are core competencies of teachers' professional developments. Teachers' curriculum development competencies are not clear, not well defined or neglected, teachers have problems concerning the curriculum development and implementation of curriculum in their fields. Understanding of curriculum philosophy, curriculum theory and curriculum development models, curriculum development studies, learning and teaching approaches and models are the most neglected aspects related to teachers' curriculum competencies. Teachers' curriculum competencies is related to micro and macro level curriculum design, development and implementation. Teachers' curriculum competencies are necessary for partnerships between teachers and the curriculum development team during the curriculum studies. Curriculum development team and the teachers have unique roles in the curriculum development process (Shkedi).

The approach of teacher-regulated curriculum will be important in near future. Thus, school-based curricula should be encouraged by teachers' researches and implementations. At the same time, this will encourage teachers to become more active participants in to the curriculum development processes. However, curriculum writers, namely curriculum design and development team do not successfully transmit their ideas to teachers (Shkedi). For this reason, curriculum studies should be projected by curriculum theorists and teachers collaboratively. It is said that curriculum studies have intensified teachers' work (Bulajeva 41). Thus, teacher competencies concerning curriculum are of great importance for teachers to conduct their profession. The competencies of teachers

encompass both theoretical and practical of curriculum. At the same time, defining teacher competencies will contribute to the improvement of the quality of educational system by positively affecting the teacher training and curriculum development studies.

The changes in science and educational system have also affected teachers' competencies. There is strong relationship among the other sciences and system of society and they affect educational system and teachers' competencies. Educational system can be based on scientific results of educational sciences, psychology, economy, technology, sociology and so on. Any kind of change and reform study in the other systems or science damage teachers' professional competencies unless teachers' competencies are developed (Carlgren 49-50). Teachers must follow all of these changes in order to improve their professional performance. The development of teachers' competencies is based on the changes in other sciences and society and is not associated with only the individualistic development but also professional development.

Today, we are talking about internationalization of curriculum studies. Internationalization of curriculum ideas is a kind of reform study and teachers ensure changes by embracing new ideas. In this respect, teachers need to have more competencies than they had before. By taking the international developments into consideration, the teacher competencies should be discussed and updated. Teachers' competencies are highly important in both implementing the current curricula effectively and training people for future by developing these curricula. Teachers who are responsible from the training of the individuals of future need to be well equipped in order to fulfill this responsibility. Teacher competencies should continuously be the subject of research and analysis and should be developed by updating. Therefore, pre-service and in-service teacher education should focus on understanding and application of teachers' competencies. As a curriculum development specialist and a teacher trainer, I believe that teachers' competencies should reflect developing conditions for sustainability.

Most of the developments of teachers' competencies do not a process but time to time some developments can occur by chance. The teachers' competencies should be reviewed consistently in parallel with the changes and reform studies through scientific studies. Teachers' main role is transferring changes into educational system and they must deal with all the changes effectively. The future will be different from the past and present in some certain respects (Avery 442). Thus, teachers need new competencies to cope with all these changes and it is necessary to redefine the teachers' competencies.

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